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Smart, H. Russell

The right to work

Manchester

[1896]

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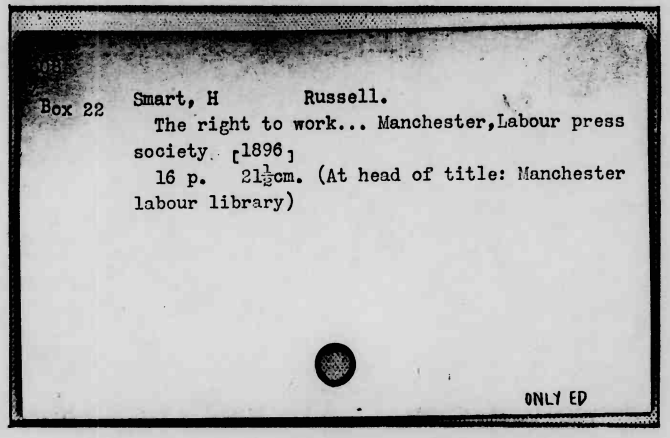
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THE RIGHT TO WORK,

BY

H. RUSSELL SMART,

PARLIAMENTARY LABOUR CANDIDATE FOR HUDDERSFIELD.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

[1896]

MANCHESTER:
Labour Press Society Ltd., Printers and Publishers, 57 and 59, Tib Street.
"Clarion" Office, 72, Fleet Street, London, E.C.
William Reeves, 185, Fleet Street, London, E.C.
Labour Literature Society Limited, 66, Brunswick Street, Glasgow.

NOW READY.

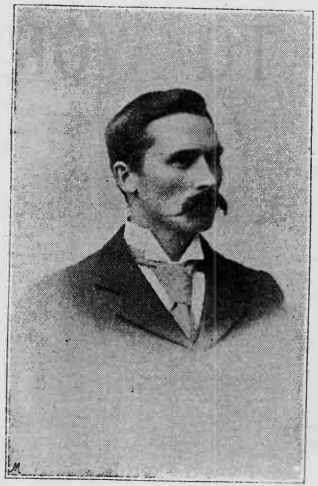
"Have ye founded your thrones and Altars, then,
On the bodies and souls of living men?
And think ye that building shall endure
Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor?"

"With gates of silver and bars of gold,
Ye have severed my sheep from their Father's fold,
I have heard the dropping of their tears
In heaven these eighteen hundred years."

—LOWELL.

What the I.L.P. is Driving at,

BY



TOM MANN.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

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MAY 21, 1916-03.03.

THE RIGHT TO WORK.

IT IS PERHAPS a truism to remark that future legislation must more and more concern itself with social and industrial rather than mere political questions.

Despite the pleadings of politicians, or the panic-stricken shrieks of the party press, the working class electorate are listening with ever increasing eagerness to those who preach the possibility of improving their economic position by vast legislative changes. Unfortunately the multiplex demands of the various sections of the labour army hinder that union of forces without which any genuine democratic advance is impossible.

The town artisan is clamouring for an eight hours day, the agricultural labourer is pleading for the right to cultivate a small patch of the soil from which he is barred, the victim of the sweated industries is begging for factory legislation. All these are reforms eminently desirable, but without sufficient identity to secure united action. Yet in all these conflicting demands one central principle may be detected. It is the passionate desire for security of existence, the right to labour and to live, that is opening the lips of the dumb suffering giant, and endeavouring to gain articulate utterance.

Though he does not trouble himself with statistics, for which he has little taste, the workman knows by his every-day experience that employment is yearly growing more precarious. Alternations of overwork and underwork occur with increasing frequency, and the resultant competition in the labour market REDUCES HIS WAGES either directly by forcing him to ACCEPT A LOWER scale of payment, or indirectly by the greater number of weeks in the year he is compelled to lose, and the increased levies he has to pay to his society if the out-of-works are to be supported and Trade Union wages maintained. Not only are his annual earnings thus diminished, but the effective years of his working life are decreasing too. The veteran of forty or forty-five has scant chance of employment when active young men are clamouring for work.

But before remedial legislation can be even suggested it is necessary to arrive at a better understanding as to who and

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What the Unemployed are.

In its larger sense the term includes the incapable from evil habits, disease, and mental and physical inferiority, as well as the genuine out-of-works. The former classes, however, demoralised as they are by a bad economic environment, may be looked on as industrially diseased, and must be treated as such by curative agencies. In the sense in which the expression is generally used, it means the able-bodied, willing industrials who are out of work through no special fault of their own as individuals, but simply through the incapacity of the commercial system to afford them employment, who form "the reserve army of labour," upon which the capitalists can draw during those periods of inflation which, with longer and longer intervals between, periodically burst upon us.

It is sometimes assumed that even these genuine unemployed are the least efficient amongst those who are able and willing to work. This would be correct if industries were thoroughly organised in great monopolies. The capitalists would, of course, first discharge those from whose labour the least profit was to be extracted. As a matter of fact, however, nothing of the kind happens. The local conditions of industry may cause capable artizans to be discharged at Glasgow whilst less efficient are in full work on the Tyne, or able-bodied labourers to be badly employed in London whilst all and sundry are working at Liverpool. And the same phenomena will occur even in the same town where the incapacity of an employer to maintain his position in the market may cause a number of his workpeople to be discharged, whilst the adjacent factory may be working overtime.*

Leaving out, then, the inefficients whose existence forms the plea by which a plutocratic Parliament excuses its neglect, we find that there is no such thing as an unemployed class, but that UNEMPLOYMENT is spread over the whole industrial community. The unemployed, though always with us *as a mass*, shrinking and swelling with the fluctuations of trade, is an ever-varying body in its component units, and with comparatively rare exceptions the whole of the working classes are continually passing through its ranks, remaining there for longer or shorter periods, according to their individual luck in the lottery of the labour market.

From this it is evident that THE UNEMPLOYED PROBLEM CANNOT BE EFFECTIVELY DEALT WITH WITHOUT TREATING THE INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM AS A WHOLE.

The question that is pressing for an immediate answer by society is:—Has a man, who is *able and willing*, the right to

* The amount of unemployment, however, will vary according to the class of labour, low-skilled workers suffering the most.

work and to retain such portion of the fruits of his industry as will afford him a fair subsistence? For without that right, our vaunted political liberty becomes the merest mockery, and the dependence of the workers upon the capitalists for permission to labour and to live, constitutes as real a slavery as ever existed in the later days of the Roman Empire. The workman has been struggling sixty years to win his political liberty, the next step must be to gain his economic freedom, or the right to labour and to live.

ECONOMIC FREEDOM may be stated as the right of every adult to demand employment of society under such conditions as to hours and wages as a healthy state of public opinion would be prepared to declare as the minimum for the humblest citizen. In Great Britain these have taken fairly articulate demand. The repeated and unanimous votes given at the recent Trades Union Congresses, the demonstrations that have been held, and the resolutions that have been passed in all the large centres of industry, show that there is a general consensus of working-class opinion in favour of EIGHT HOURS constituting the maximum working day, whilst the historic battle of the dockers for "the tanner" set the low water mark of Trade Union wages at SIXPENCE PER HOUR, a principle since accepted and acted on by the London County Council.

A matter requiring careful consideration is—On whom the onus of providing the work should fall. The responsibility of the central authority, the representative of the nation, is absolute, still convenience points to the local bodies as the units of administration, yet any attempt to induce the Municipalities to moralize the industrial conditions merely by local pressure is doomed to failure, for isolated action is useless. The principal characteristic of modern labour is its fluidity, and like other fluids it invariably seeks its own level. Should London or Liverpool adopt a policy that would appreciably raise the condition of its inhabitants above the general level, streams of superfluous labour would be attracted from the more backward centres until the increased competition in the one place and the decreased competition in the others had again readjusted the level. It is therefore necessary that Parliament should compel the local authorities to take simultaneous action. An exact precedent is afforded by the Education Acts by which the state compels the municipalities to provide a certain minimum standard of education for the children, but leaves to them the details of administration.

The question as to the kind of work that the local authorities should provide also presents considerable but not insurmountable difficulties. It must be work capable of being performed by every able-bodied adult without special skill, that is, it must be common labour.

Economic freedom may now be defined as :—The Right to demand common labour from the local authority for a maximum working day of eight hours, and a minimum wage of twenty-four shillings a week.

It is very obvious that the Right to Work must be subject to the condition of efficiency, or the evils of the old Poor Law would be revived and intensified. The local authorities must be invested with guarded rights of dismissal free enough to allow them to maintain a high standard of efficiency and discipline, yet sufficiently restricted to prevent a hostile Council attempting to evade the spirit of the measure, either by wholesale dismissals or setting the standard of efficiency so high that all but the ablest labourers would be weeded out. The method of dealing with this difficulty is treated in the appendix.

The efforts then of the United Labour Party should be directed to obtain from Parliament an Act compelling the Local Authorities to grant the Right to Work under the conditions specified to every citizen who has resided a certain qualifying period within their boundaries.

In discussing the economic effects likely to be produced by such a measure, the first objection that strikes the uneconomic mind is that it would immediately cause the COLLAPSE OF THE INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM by the fact that every person receiving less than the minimum wage would immediately throw himself out of employment. This view is very well summarised in a leading article in the *Manchester Guardian* of April 15th, 1895 :—

> The first result would be that almost all the labourers who now earn less than 24s. a week would send in their notices to their present employers and enter the municipal service. Probably a quarter of a million coal miners in England alone are now earning on the average less than the 24s. The average wages of the agricultural labourers do not reach that sum. Take an absurdly low estimate, and suppose that there are in the United Kingdom only five million persons now earning less than 24s. a week, and desirous of earning more. . . We have put the number who would seek work from the local governments very low in the first instance, but it would soon rise. The exodus of labour would at once bring agriculture and coal mining to a dead stop, and their stoppage would in a few weeks bring almost every industry in the country to a dead stop too.

The obvious answer to this is that the capitalists finding their wealth producers threatening to leave them in this wholesale fashion, would be compelled to so adjust their industries as to offer counter attractions at least equal to the new conditions available.

The only terms on which they would be able to engage labourers would be by offering :—

Permanent employment, affording absolute security of existence ;

A rigid Eight Hours Day in all trades not affected by direct legislation ;

A minimum wage of 24s. per week in all industries.

Which conditions would form the absolute low water mark of British Labour.

Could the industrial system be expected to survive under these new requirements? To that, perhaps, the best reply would be that it must take its chance. It is continuously asserted that the free play of competition affords a livelihood for everyone who is able and willing to work. Few would seriously assert that 24s. a week is more than the absolute minimum upon which a workman should be expected to support himself and his family. If it be true then, as the *Manchester Guardian* seems to assert, that the industrial system cannot afford this bare subsistence to the workers, then it were better that it should collapse from its inherent rottenness, and that society should either revert to a happier condition of barbarism, or that the state should at once proceed to organise society, and assume those functions which capitalism is by this confession unable to perform. Capitalism however, has far more robustness in it than some of its most strenuous advocates seem willing to admit.

Modern economic science has clearly established THE ECONOMY OF HIGH WAGES, and that there is no labour so dear as cheap labour. English labour is more efficient than that of the Continent, for the reason that it is more highly paid, that is, that the subsistence is higher. "Sir Thomas Brassey found that English navvies employed upon the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada, and receiving from 5s. to 6s. a day, did a greater amount of work for the money than French Canadians paid at 3s. 6d. a day ; that it was more profitable to employ Englishmen at 3s. to 3s. 6d. upon making Irish railways than Irishmen at 1s. 6d. to 1s. 8d. A detailed comparison of England, the United States, and the Continent as regards the present condition of the cotton industry yields the same general results. A comparison between England and the United States shows that in weaving, where wages are much higher in America, the labour is so much more efficient as to make the cost of production considerably lower than in England."* It is a common place saying that thirty years ago the wages of the agricultural labourer were so low that he was not even worth the miserable pittance he received. Ordinary observation bears out these statements. The well fed, well housed operative, with moderate hours, is more physically fit for his labour, goes at it with greater pluck, energy, and ingenuity than the underfed, discontented drudge of industry. Again, the higher wages have a tendency to stimulate the introduction of labour saving processes. The best machinery is always attracted to the highly paid trades.

* These quotations are from "Evolution of Modern Capitalism," chap. x., by John A. Hobson, M.A. The whole book should be read.

A brief consideration of the figures of the national income and its distribution afford irrefutable evidence that it would be possible to increase wages and shorten hours to an extent far beyond what is contemplated in this proposal, without raising the price of a single article of consumption, and yet leave the capitalist a sufficient margin to induce them to set the machinery of production in motion.

THE NATIONAL INCOME.

Rent (*i.e.* the tax wrung from industry by idleness for permission to use the gifts of Nature)	£230,000,000	
Interest (*i.e.* the tax wrung from industry by idleness for permission to use the stored-up results of past labour).....	£280,000,000	
Unearned Incomes.....		£510,000,000
Profits, Salaries, etc., or the sum taken in addition by the possessors of land and capital for the personal services they render.....	£410,000,000	
Incomes of the monopolied classes	£920,000,000	
Wages of the manual labourers	530,000,000	
Total National Income		£1,450,000,000*

Thus the unearned incomes of rent and interest nearly equal the entire sum drawn in wages by the industrial classes.

Competition settles prices. The amount that goes to rent, interest and profit is dependent on wages. If the cost of production be high, then rent will be low, and *vice-versa*, and if the whole of the £510,000.000 now extracted from the workers were transferred to them in wages the classes would still have sufficient inducement in the £410,000,000 that would be left them, to employ their land and capital in production. Nothing so drastic is contemplated, but the figures are sufficient to show the hollowness of the outcry that profits are too low to afford a fair remuneration and decent conditions to the workers.†

If the various industries that fall below the stipulated minimum conditions be considered in detail the same conclusions are apparent. The industry that would be most affected is that of

AGRICULTURE.

The wages of the rural labourers average less than 14s. per week. Could the farmer, in face of foreign competition, so greatly increase the rate of wages and

* "Facts for Socialists," Fabian Society, 276, Strand, London, W.C.

† It is nearer the truth to say that a great deal of the profits *realised* are recklessly wasted in the mad extravagance of competition between employers to oust each other from the markets.

yet survive? In a recent Parliamentary return on "The Relations of wages to Cost of Production" a list of farms is given, showing the value of the produce, total expenditure, cost of labour, etc. In regard to twelve of these the rent is given, viz.:—

No.	Cost of Labour.		Rent	
1	£177	.....	Rent.....	£260
2	1,693	.....	Rent, rates and taxes	1,098
3	458	.....	Rent	505
4	243	.....	Rent	475
5	576	.....	Rent and tithes....	1,085
6	480	.....	Rent	555
7	822	.....	Rent, rates and taxes	942
8	80	.....	Rent and tithes....	136
9	20	.....	Rent, rates and taxes	197
10	718	.....	Rent	880
11	348	.....	Rent	443
12	360	.....	Rent and tithes	1,203
Total.....	£5,975			£7,779

In these cases we see that rent comes to considerably more than the amount paid for wages.

In the same return the the total amount paid in wages to the agricultural labourers is estimated at £58,000,000 in 1878, and £50,000,000 in 1888. Schedule A of the Income Tax gives the rentals paid to the landowners in these two years as £69,300,000, and £61,300,000.*

Thus the sum paid to the monopolists simply for permission to use the soil of Britain, actually exceeds by 22½ per cent. the wages paid to the labourers for its cultivation, and the wages of the agricultural labourers right throughout Great Britain might be raised to a minimum of 24s. per week, and yet leave the present profits of the farmers untouched and a margin of £15,000,000 a year as rent for the landlords, even supposing there was no increase in the efficiency of the labourers from their better conditions. In the event of such a measure becoming law, the farmers throughout the country knowing that when the act came into force their labour bill would be doubled, would give notice to terminate their tenancies unless the rent were reduced in proportion, and as the landowner could not farm the land by his own unaided exertion, he would have no option but to accept the terms offered.†

If the finances of the

RAILWAY SYSTEM

be investigated the same facts are apparent. The railway

* The figures are taken from a leaflet entitled "Fair Trade" issued by the Financial Reform Association, Hackin's Hey, Liverpool.

† This is assuming that the present system of farming continues unchanged, but as it is obviously on the decline a more probable result would be a largely increased extension of small holdings rented by the peasants from the local authorities. This is dealt with later on.

companies employ 380,000 men, of whom probably 200,000 will be earning on the average 4s. less than the desired minimum, whilst the hours of labour of all will average sixty per week. The cost of the new regulations may be roughly estimated at about £10,000,000 a year.

The railway receipts for 1894 were a total of £82,000,000, of which £46,000,000 (nearly) was spent in working expenses, and more than £36,000,000 was handed over to the shareholders as dividends. The effect of the measure would be to transfer £10,000,000 of this surplus to the wage-earners, leaving the idle shareholders £26,000,000 a year, surely a sufficient sum for them to extract as toll for the use of the national highways.

The same facts are in evidence with regard to

COAL MINING.

The total number of workers of all kinds in 1892 was 659,000. The total output of coal was 281,675,000 tons, for which the coalmasters and owners received the sum of £66,050,500. The 659,000 men and boys who won the coal received in wages the sum of £27,600,000. The balance of £38,455,500 went to middleman, capitalist and landlord as rent, royalties, profits, etc. To give the minimum wage of 24s. to the adult workers would merely transfer some £10,000,000 a year from these unearned incomes to the wages of the miners.

Similar facts could be educed as to other industries did space permit. It is well known in the woollen industry that a weaver in a rural district, working with the old hand-loom in his own cottage, and selling the cloth himself, can earn a wage equal to that which he would receive in a factory. The whole advantage of the improved machinery and steam power is thus skimmed off by the landlord and capitalist as rent and interest.

Thus it is clear that the staple industries could easily adapt themselves to the new regulations, even assuming that there was no increase in production occasioned by the higher standard of living which the measure would bring about.

There is little doubt, however, that

THE SWEATED TRADES

would be either revolutionised or extinguished, for it is in these that the irregularity of overwork and underwork is most prevalent. The larger the concern the more stable as a rule are the conditions of employment. The small master giving out piece work at starvation prices to be executed in the homes of the hands, or in a small workshop he rents by the week, may give up his business as soon as ever his trade declines. The industry offers no resistance to trade fluctuations, and therefore trade fluctuations are encouraged. But the big employer is in a different position. He is under heavy fixed charges of

rent, interest on capital, the maintenance of buildings and machinery, the expenses of advertising, together with the salaries of the managers, travellers, clerks, foremen and others who form the permanent staff. In order, therefore, to ensure the success of his enterprise he must run it continuously or nearly so, even should he sometimes run it at a loss, and the volume of trade is spread over the year instead of twelve months work being crammed into six. But even if extinguished it would be merely a transference and not a loss of employment. The sweated trades are largely maintained by the poor themselves, whose scanty wages only permit them to purchase the lowest class of goods. The increased purchasing power which the improved conditions would give all classes of the workers alike would enable them to buy a better class of commodities, and thus the displaced workers would be absorbed in the higher class industries.

Space does not permit of a more exhaustive analysis, but sufficient evidence has been given to show that the statement that British trade would collapse if decent conditions of life were given to the workers is merely a reappearance of the hoary-headed bogie that is always paraded by the capitalist press in opposition to any reform that promises to elevate the social and moral conditions of the masses.

The skilled artisan, or those who are receiving more than the minimum wage, may be expected to ask where would be the benefit to them? It might be sufficient to reply that the removal of the sweating, misery and uncertainty prevailing right through the ranks of low paid labour would benefit them morally and socially as citizens. As a matter of fact, however, all classes of wage-earners would be benefitted materially. Every intelligent artisan knows that the standard of life of the low paid, low skilled worker is the foundation on which the remuneration of all other workers is based. Skilled labour is merely multiplied common labour, and if the conditions of the lowest paid be raised to the level of the average, a general rise in wages must speedily follow throughout the rest of the wage-earning community.

A word is necessary as to the effect of the proposed measure on

WOMEN'S LABOUR.

There has been no attempt made in this essay to distinguish between the labour of the sexes. If the actual payment of women is to be less than men, less work must be exacted from them, so that at any rate they shall receive equal remuneration for equal work, instead of as to-day being paid on a scale that is thirty to fifty per cent less. It is a question, however, whether even this

distinction should be made, for though woman may not be the equal of man in physical strength, yet the services she renders are quite as valuable to the community. Too often also the tyranny of the capitalist in the factory is supplemented by a worse tyranny in the home. The measure would give her the opportunity of escaping from both should she desire it, and would spare her from the last resource of underpaid female labour, that of having to eke out her scanty wages on the streets.

The last matter to consider is what the effect upon

THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

would be. It has already been shown that the number of applicants for employment would be far less than might at first be supposed, less perhaps in the first instance than the actual number of those who are unemployed to-day, for the shortening of the hours of labour, and the raising of the spending powers of the workers, would cause an increased demand for commodities, and consequently for labour to produce them. At the same time the want of expansion in our foreign markets, and the squeezing out of the workers by labour-saving processes, would cause a steady stream of applicants to flow from private employment to the municipality.

Laws are made for evil doers, not for honest folk. It is better to take as an illustration the unfavourable case of a municipality, whose Council is composed principally of the plutocratic class, and who therefore would, as a body, be hostile to the Act, and would as far as possible, it may be presumed, endeavour to evade its operation.

As property owners and the representatives of property owners they would however be animated by the characteristic of their class—the desire to keep down the cost of communal expenditure. They would have full power to employ the surplus labour in whatever direction they might deem most desirable. If they displayed no greater capacity than has been shown hitherto, and merely organized the ordinary unproductive relief works, then the cost of sustaining the municipal labourers would fall as a permanent charge upon the rates, that is, would have to be defrayed by the town councillors themselves and the class to which they belong. With such pressure applied to them, pressure from which would be no release, their own interests and the "incentive of gain" would induce them to exercise that organizing and managerial ability which (as we are informed) is a special monopoly of the wealthy classes, and to undertake productive industries in order that the men employed might raise value at least equal to the wages they would receive. Thus the very inertia of the ratepayers, the dread of increasing the cost of communal expenditure that now acts as a break on the

wheels of the democratic train, would then be turned and used as a force driving it towards collectivism. Not only so but this automatic pressure would (no doubt after many mistakes) direct them to the proper kind of industries to be adopted. The markets are already glutted with commodities for which there is no effective demand, and the only effect of opening municipal tailoring or boot factories would be the displacement somewhere else in the industrial system of a number of workmen equal to those employed by the municipality.

They would, therefore, have to seek for fresh purchasing power.

What is

THE SOURCE OF PURCHASING POWER?

The answer is the production of food commodities. A simple illustration will make the matter clear.

Let us suppose A B and C are working on three plots of land independently of each other. They each spend a third of their working time in growing themselves their necessary food, another third they devote to manufacturing themselves necessary commodities, such as clothes, furniture, shoes, etc., whilst the third portion is devoted to the manufacture of articles of luxury. But as this isolated method of production is wasteful of labour, they divide up employments. A turns himself into a farmer, and devotes the whole of his time to growing food. B becomes a manufacturer of necessary commodities, and C of articles of luxury. A now consumes a third of the food he produces, and with the other two-thirds purchases one-third of the products of B. and C. respectively, whilst B and C exchange with one another. They are now in their original positions, except that by reason of the division of labour they have produced their stock of commodities in a shorter time.

It will be claimed by the individualist that this is a fair bargain, but if it be looked into it is the most one sided bargain that can possibly be imagined, A is the only buyer, B. and C. *sell* to him and exchange with one another.* A may at any time decide to be more economical, to be content with less clothes or luxuries, instantly B. and C, who cannot do with less food are reduced to privation, and though their houses may be overflowing with coats, shoes, watches and jewelry, yet they are merely suffering from overproduction, and should A decide to purchase elsewhere they are at once reduced to starvation and misery, and unless they can find fresh purchasers their ruin is complete. However much the thread of this simple illustration be complicated by the tangle

* It would be more correct to say that B. whilst selling to A. buys from C., but it is unneccessary to complicate the illustration.

of modern industry, the essential principle remains the same, that the production of food, and in the main that means the production of wheat, is the first source of purchasing power.

The decay of agriculture

is rapidly turning us into a nation of shopkeepers, unable to purchase even the necessaries of life until we have sold our goods. Every year the produce of the soil is diminishing, not only in value but in volume. Every year greater numbers of agricultural labourers are compelled to leave the rural districts for the towns, are turned, that is to say, from purchasers of manufactured commodities into manufacturers of those commodities. The consequence is we are becoming yearly more and more dependent on our FOREIGN TRADE, which is scarcely able to maintain its position, let alone expand sufficientlv to bring fresh purchasers within the circle of our markets to take the place of those displaced, and to find employment for the new competitors.

Nor is this movement confined to Great Britain, it is a phenomenon of capitalist production everywhere. Foreign nations which formerly bought our manufactures are now producing for themselves, and are even competing with us in the neutral markets of the world. Where then are we to find the fresh outlets for our goods. Impoverished India is admittedly trembling on the verge of bankruptcy; China, with its teeming millions, reduced to the lowest subsistence point, has no capacity for further absorbing our surplus manufactures; the African bubble has burst almost before it was blown; the world is exploited, and science is not sufficiently developed to enable us to send a filibustering expedition to another planet, and so bring fresh races under the heel of the British capitalist. The only hope for the revival of trade, the only solution of the labour movement, nay, the only means of staving off that NATIONAL BANKRUPTCY which the economic evolution is rapidly bringing about, is to cease the mad race for foreign markets, the cause of nearly all the wars, bloodshed and oppression, with which our annals have been stained for the past half-century and more, and set ourselves seriously to open up the market at our doors. The process that has been going on so long must be reversed and labour returned to the soil from which it has been torn. But when we turn to our present system of agriculture we find that it has hopelessly broken down. THE BRITISH FARMER has failed to keep pace with the march of industrialism, and is in the same position in the world market of to-day that a manufacturer of a century ago would be if suddenly restored to life and expected to compete under modern conditions. Clinging to obsolete traditions, incapable of absorbing new ideas, starving

the land of labour, exhausting it with stimulants, his capital filched from him by landlord extortion, which he has had neither the intelligence nor the courage to resist, his one panacea—protection, the British farmer is a type of arrested development, which it is to be devoutly hoped will speedily become extinct. The local authorities, in endeavouring to find employment for the applicants, would have to return to the soil the labour which had so long been divorced from it, and undertake the cultivation of the land by the most scientific methods. The large tracts they would have under cultivation and the ample capital and labour they could apply to it would enable them to reap the fullest advantage of the law of "increasing returns" which has been the feature of the Industrial Revolution. The boundless resources of capital and labour, the improved machinery and processes that would be at their disposal, the scientific and expert direction they could afford to engage; above all, the disposal upon the land of the towns' refuse, now so iniquitously wasted, may well cause us to look with hopeful vision to

MUNICIPAL FARMING

as the farming of the future.

On the other hand the remarkable results realized by the small cultivator points to a considerable extension of the system of allotments and small holdings.

The question of large versus small cultivation would however settle itself quite automatically. If the agricultural labourers could earn as much by the cultivation of a plot of land—rented from the local authority—as by working on the municipal farm, it may be taken for granted he would prefer to do so. Most probably both systems of cultivation would go in side by side, the municipalities producing on a large scale and by scientific methods the staple foods, such as cereals, vegetables, cattle, &c., whilst the small farmer would devote himself to supplying the demand for those foods that require much hand labour and careful attention, such as fruit growing, poultry raising, and other foods that may be classed under the head of luxuries.*

The produce would be placed upon the market in the ordinary way, and instead of purchasing our food from abroad

* The land required would of course be purchased under a compulsory clause, similar to those in the Allotment Acts, that is, by the issue of bonds bearing interest at the current rate. With the automatic pressure of the Act and the intelligent growth of public enterprise, in time, all the land and industries would thus be "socialized," and the bonds would form a high mortgage over the national industries. The interest on these and on the existing bonds would offer the most attractive fund for taxation to the future Socialist Chancellor of the Exchequer. From this source he could defray the cost of old age pensions, free railways, maintenance of children, and other objects of communal expenditure. Ultimately, the tax would grow to 20s. in the £ when "unearned incomes" would cease to exist.

we should spend the money at home. The value realized it may be taken would more than equal the wages paid and other expenses. The agricultural labourers would purchase back part of the food they produced, and the rest of their wages would be expended in manufactured commodities. At once new purchasing power would be opened up. Cottages for the agriculturalists would be required, farm buildings would have to be erected, clothing, furniture, and so forth would be wanted, and from motives of economy the local authorities might be expected to meet this demand themselves and so save the contractors' profits. And as the workers displaced from the capitalist system would seek municipal employment, so the circle of public enterprise would gradually widen out until it would embrace the majority of the citizens and most of the staple industries of the country.

Such in the main outlines is the proposal by which the worst evils of the workman's life may be removed, and freedom of mind and body assured to him, independently of fashion's caprice or a master's whim. I do not attempt to say it is a panacea for all our social ills, but I do say it is the first step by which the others may be reached. It applies to all ranks of labour alike, and would unite the scattered forces into one coherent army. It is a proposal which whilst it is simplicity itself carries with it a vast economic change, and a vaster social and moral reformation. It is not so much the low wages or long hours under which the toilers are suffering to-day, it is the uncertainty of existence and the slavery produced by it that dims their intellectual vision and degrades their lives. Remove the ever-haunting fear of loss of work, secure the workman in his economic freedom and he will soon demand his full share of the joys of existence and the rights that are to-day denied him.

APPENDIX.

For those who are desirous of further details the following clauses of a Bill securing the right to work to all adults, may be of service. Only the main clauses, shorn of legal phraseology, are inserted; subsidiary questions that do not affect any vital principle being omitted.

A BILL

To provide the right of employment to the adult inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland.

1.—This Act may be cited as the Right to Work Act, 1895. Short Title.

2.—In this Act the expresssion "local authority" shall mean the council of any incorporated Borough, or of any rural parish, or of the county of London, and the expression "labourer" shall mean the person applying for employment to, or being employed by any local authority. Definitions.

3.— Any person or persons over twenty-one years of age who have resided for six calendar months or longer within the area administered by any local authority, may demand employment of such local authority, and the local authority shall within eight days of the period of such application, provide employment for the person or persons demanding it. Qualifying Conditions.

4.—The employment shall consist of digging.....cubic yards of earth, or picking.....lbs. of oakum, or or breaking.....cwt. of stone* in each day, at the option of the local authority, or **such other work as may be agreed upon between the local authority and the labourer.** The task work

5.—The time at which the labourer shall commence work shall be such as the local authority may determine, but the number of hours worked shall not exceed nine in any one day, or forty-eight in any one week. Hours of Labour.

6.—The local authority shall pay the labourer each week wages of not less than one pound four shillings. Minimum Wages.

7.—The labourer may leave the employment of the local authority on giving fourteen days notice. Leaving Employment.

8.—The local authority may discharge the labourer should he:— Dismissal.

(*a*) Fail to perform the task work specified in clause 4.
(*b*) Be absent from his work without leave.
(*c*) Arrive later than the time determined by the local authority for commencing work.
(*d*) Leave before the conclusion of the days work, as specified in clause 5.
(*e*) Leave the employment of the local authority without giving notice, as specified in clause 7.

Unless the labourer can show that any of the offences specified in this clause are due to sickness, family affliction, or unavoidable accident.

9.—When the labourer is dismissed for any other offences specified in clause 8, his right to demand employment under this Act shall lapse until he has again qualified himself by a further period of six months residence, as specified in clause 3. Conditions of Re-employment

10.—Should the value of the produce of the industries administered by any local authority show a surplus Surplus above Wages.

*The amount of this task work would be the amount that an average labourer could perform in a day without either over-exertion or under-exertion.

above cost of production and other expenses, such surplus shall at the option of the local authority be applied in any of the following methods:—

(*a*) Returned to the labourers as bonus on wages.
(*b*) Expended in paying higher wages.
(*c*) Expended in shortening the hours of labour.
(*d*) In supplying free of charge commodities for the consumption of the labourers.

Powers for working the Act.

11.—The local authority shall have power to compulsorily purchase any land at its market value, and to erect thereon any necessary buildings, and to purchase stock and materials for the purposes of this Act, and to undertake any industries it may desire.

Rating power.

12.—The local authority shall have power to levy a special rate for the purposes of this Act upon the rental value of all lands and buildings within its boundaries; but lands or buildings which are used for charitable purposes, or are free for public use shall be exempt from such rate.

Clause 4 is the only part of the Bill that is not self explanatory.

It is not suggested that the local authorities should set the applicants to work upon the unpleasant and unproductive labour of stone-breaking, which if necessary can be better done by machinery; but the amount constituting a fair days work being capable of being stated in actual figures, this task work would form the measuring rod by which all other kinds of labour might be gauged.

The council as the representative of the ratepayers—and especially of the property owning ratepayers—would be unlikely to set men at a comparatively high rate of wages, to work on useless undertakings. They would, assuming they had a reasonable regard for their own interests, seek means whereby the labourers might produce wealth more or less equal in value to the sum they would receive in wages, whilst the somewhat disagreeable nature of the task work would cause the men to be ready enough to "agree" to perform any other kind of labour that promised to be of a pleasanter character. Should a man here and there shirk his fair share of work, he could be put upon the measured tasks, and if he loafed at an occupation, which by comparison would be of a pleasant nature, he would be at least equally likely to loaf at the measured work, in which case the local authority could exercise its right of dismissal. On the other hand, should the local authority attempt to evade the Act by endeavouring to exact more than a fair day's work, the labourers could refuse to perform it, in which case the "agreement" would be at an end and the local authorities would be compelled to provide the task work, the threatened expense of which would be sufficient to make them relax the onerous conditions, whilst its unpleasant nature would be a sufficient deterrent to prevent the demand being made unless the grievance were genuine. The clause would further protect the skilled workmen should the local authority attempt to take advantage of his necessities and compel him to play the blackleg by doing skilled work for unskilled wages. It is true the artisan would have no power to demand work at his particular trade or better conditions than would be obtainable by the common labourer. But in organising large masses of low skilled workers, much highly skilled work would necessarily be required, and for that the proper trade union rate would have to be paid. All that is necessary is to prevent special skill being exploited unless a fair rent of ability is paid for its use.

The specified task would thus form a common denominator or measuring rod by which the value of every form of labour could be arrived at, and it would be at once a safeguard by which loafing on the one hand or sweating on the other could be effectually prevented.

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